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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 SHANGHAI 000360

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SUBJECT: SHANGHAI ACADEMICS ON CHINA'S PROTESTANTS, CCC/TSPM  
LEADERSHIP

REF: A) 2007 SHANGHAI 105; B) 2007 SHANGHAI 664; C) 2007 SHANGHAI 47

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Beede, Pol/Econ Section Chief, U.S.  
Consulate , Shanghai .  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Academic contacts in Shanghai describe Protestantism in China as growing in number and diversity. There are three categories of Protestants in China: the official church, unofficial urban churches, and unofficial rural churches. Members of unofficial rural churches have limited contact with overseas churches, tend to be very secretive, and are especially pious. Unofficial urban churches have wealthier parishioners, numerous contacts with overseas churches, and well-educated members. Efforts by the official church (also known as the China Christian Council/Three Self-Patriotic Movement, or CCC/TSPM) to control the underground churches have been ineffective. The academics are also unimpressed with the CCC's new President, Gao Feng, and said that, in general, the CCC/TSPM's new batch of leaders lack the intellect and influence of past leaders. One academic predicted that the growth of Protestantism will eventually slow down as the Chinese infatuation with the West wanes. End Summary.

Protestantism Growing  
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¶2. (C) In late July/early August, Poloffs met with some of Shanghai's leading religious academic experts to discuss the development of Protestantism in East China. In a conversation with Poloffs on August 7, East China Normal University Professor Liu Zhongyu provided an overview of how religions are developing in China. He is one of the researchers who conducted a famous and controversial survey on religious belief in China in late ¶2006. That survey found that China could have as many as 300 million religious believers. (See reftel A.) Liu still stands by the survey's findings, noting that the questions were very clear and produced clear results showing that 31.4 percent of people surveyed were religious. He attributed the increase in religious believers to two factors. First, people can be more open about their religious beliefs and are more willing to discuss their beliefs. Second, the spread of a market economy in China has increased the level of insecurity in people's lives. People are turning to religion to deal with these insecurities.

¶3. (C) According to the survey's findings, the majority of the people surveyed are followers of traditional Eastern religions

such as Buddhism (33.1 percent), traditional folk religions (26.5 percent) or Daoism (6.4) percent. A significant portion (12.4 percent) are Protestants. Only 6 percent of the people surveyed saw themselves as Catholics. Liu added that while China is still dominated by traditional Eastern religions, Protestantism is the fastest growing religion. Protestantism is growing in both urban and rural communities. In cities, college students and professors are interested in Protestantism because of their admiration for Western ideas and trends. Students who have traveled abroad also tend to convert to Protestantism and bring back their religious beliefs to the universities. Protestantism in the countryside can be traced back to the work of Western missionaries in the early 1900s. At first, these missionaries had problems converting people because traditional religions were still very strong. However, during the Cultural Revolution, many Buddhist temples and other religious buildings were destroyed, making it impossible for people to go to temples. Many people turned to Protestantism which did not require believers to go to a certain place to worship.

#### Chinese Protestants: Rural, Urban, and Official

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14. (C) Contacts described three distinctively different groups of Protestants: Urban Underground/Unofficial Churches, Rural Underground/Unofficial Churches, and the Official Church. East China Normal University Professor Liu said that the three branches largely operate independently of each other and there is little communication between them.

#### Urban Underground Churches

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15. (C) Fudan University Department of Philosophy Religious

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Research Division Professor Liu Ping (Protect) in a meeting on July 29 described urban underground churches. Hailing from rural Anhui, Liu grew up in a rural underground church and many of his family members are leaders in the church. Liu himself is a leader of an underground church in Shanghai. He recently returned from a secret meeting of leaders of underground churches from Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan, and Nanjing. Participants in the meeting reported that there has been an increase of governmental scrutiny and pressure because of the Olympics. Some members were told not to hold large meetings during this time period, said Liu. Most members of the underground church know what the government's redlines are. If church events get too big and people become too open about their religion then they will be visited by local security services.

16. (C) According to Liu, urban underground church members tend to be educated white collar workers in their 30's and 40's. He said it is impossible to calculate how many people are members of these types of churches. In some cities like Beijing, one church can have several hundred members, while in other cities the number is much less. His church in Shanghai has about 300 people. Like East China Normal University Professor Liu Zhongyu, Liu Ping said that urban underground churches are dominated by students and professors, many of whom have traveled to the West and joined Protestant churches during their studies.

Fudan University Center for American Studies Professor Xu Yihua, a well-known expert on Protestantism, had a similar view. He said that 2.7 percent of students at Fudan University are Christian and that it was not uncommon to see students praying in the university's cafeterias.

17. (C) Liu Ping said that the biggest challenge for urban underground churches is to find meeting places. Some local governments refuse to allow these churches to rent space. The CCC/TSPM controls meeting places for Protestants and will not allow underground churches to use their space. Some underground churches have tried to register, but these applications have been denied because the churches refuse to come under the control of the CCC/TSPM. Calling the CCC/TSPM a governmental organization and a "fake church", Liu said that underground

churches do not want to be controlled by the CCC/TSPM. Joining the CCC/TSPM imposes too many limitations on churches. The churches have to use CCC/TSPM pastors and also accept the CCC/TSPM's theological views. In addition, these churches also have to supply the government with lots of sensitive information such as the names of parishioners and sources of funding in order to register.

18. (C) Liu Ping said that the situation is very different in Zhejiang Province. There is a strong division between church and state and there is no tension with the local government. In Zhejiang, there are independent churches within the CCC/TSPM that do not need to use CCC/TSPM preachers and have their own sources of funding.

19. (C) According to Liu Ping, urban underground churches have extensive ties to churches in the United States. Many church leaders receive training from U.S. churches. U.S. churches also provide financial and material support as well as exchange opportunities. Although the growth of urban underground churches would not have been possible without support from abroad, relations with U.S. churches have also had a negative affect on local churches. First, establishing relations with a U.S. church leads to increased governmental scrutiny and harassment. Second, as relations with U.S. churches deepen, local underground churches are beginning to divide themselves into different denominations. Chinese Protestant churches traditionally have not divided into different denominations. But, more and more Chinese churches are trying to mirror their U.S. partners and now see themselves as belonging to different denominations.

#### Rural Underground Churches: In a World of Their Own

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10. (C) Contacts described rural underground churches as being more pious and very secretive. Few contacts had strong connections to these churches. Fudan University Professor Liu Ping noted that some migrant workers in Shanghai have started their own churches. Like the churches in the countryside, these migrant churches refuse to let people who are not from the same background into the church. To participate in these churches one needs to come from the same town and speak the same dialect

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as other parishioners. East China Normal University Professor Liu Zhongyu had a similar view and noted that rural underground churches would likely not allow someone from an urban underground church to preach at their church.

11. (C) Professor Liu Zhongyu said that it is difficult for the CCC/TSPM to control underground rural churches. While some churches allow local CCC/TSPM officials to attend their services and have a more cooperative relationship, most rural church members believe there is no need for them to communicate with the CCC/TSPM. They do not need to use CCC/TSPM meeting sites and often hold services in crude buildings such as barns or warehouses. Underground rural church members also believe that CCC/TSPM theology and practices do not fit their beliefs. Many rural churches' theology and practices can be traced back to Western missionaries. Rural churches also do not have much contact with Western churches.

#### CCC/TSPM: Leadership Crisis?

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12. (C) Contacts did not have a high regard for the new CCC President Gao Feng. The 47-year old Gao replaced former CCC President Cao Shengjie in the summer of 2007. Fudan University Professor Liu Peng said that Gao is not as conservative as Cao but he still is not very open and tends to listen to the Central Government. Fudan University Center for American Studies Professor Xu said Gao is not as qualified nor as capable as Cao. The new CCC/TSPM leaders do not have the same level of intellect or political influence as past leaders. East China Normal University Professor Liu Zhongyu had a similar view. He

added, however, that it would be very difficult for modern CCC/TSPM leaders to attain the same level of expertise as Cao. He worked with Cao for a number of years at a research institute that specialized in religion. Cao has a deep understanding of theological issues that was acquired after years of intensive research.

¶13. (C) Liu Zhongyu agreed that the current generation of CCC/TSPM leaders are not of the same quality as past generations of leaders. He said this was due in part to societal reasons. Cao's generation was educated before the Cultural Revolution. They came from comparatively wealthy families and received a good education. The current crop of leaders received their education after the Cultural Revolution, when many seminaries were closed. Even after the seminaries were reopened in the early 1980s there were no teachers around to work at them and only basic classes were taught. In addition, those who entered the seminary tended to be from poorer families in the countryside. Most only had a high school education and some even only had a junior high education.

¶14. (C) Liu Zhongyu said that the other major reason why the quality of CCC/TSPM leaders has declined is connected to the leaders themselves. For the past ten years, he has taught classes to CCC/TSPM cadre and also to Buddhist leaders. He noticed that a certain sector of these groups tend to stop studying once they become leaders. They act more like government bureaucrats than religious leaders. He also faults them for not being as pious as they should be. Many just parrot what is said by the government. This affects their credibility with their parishioners. There is no need for pastors to oppose the government, but pastors also do not need to mindlessly repeat what the government says.

#### Impossible to Control

¶15. (C) According to the academics, the CCC/TSPM is largely ineffective in trying to control the underground churches. East China Normal University Professor Liu explained that in addition to trying to control meeting sites (see paras 7 and 11), the CCC/TSPM has been trying to control who receives training as a pastor. Urban underground churches are able to bypass the CCC/TSPM and get training materials from U.S. Churches. Some churches are also able to send their pastors to the United States for training. Rural underground church leaders do not appear to need training to attract followers. Many rural leaders are self taught. Fudan University CAS Professor Xu added that it is difficult for local governments to control churches because of their limited local government resources. There are comparatively few Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) officials. It is impossible for these officials to tightly

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control every church and temple in their district. In addition, some churches have wealthy parishioners and do not require any financial assistance from the RAB. Churches with wealthy parishioners also tend to have good connections to the local government and, therefore, do not need to rely on the RAB or CCC/TSPM.

#### A Slowdown in the Future

¶16. (C) Contacts had different predictions for the future of Protestantism in China. Li Feng, East China University of Political Science and Law Associate Professor, in a meeting on August 1 said that the growth of Protestantism will slow down as China's infatuation with all things Western fades. He added that Chinese have a different attitude towards religion from Westerners. They see it like a "supermarket" and take what they need from different religions without committing fully to any one.

#### The Rise of The Lay Volunteers

¶17. (C) East China Normal University Professor Liu Zhongyu thought that the CCC/TSPM will pay more attention to the needs of its parishioners. This is due in part to the Chinese Central Government's emphasis on the people. The CCC/TSPM takes its cues from the Central Government and will likely adopt more populist policies. Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Religious Studies Association Associate Research Professor Yan Kejia in a meeting on July 18 had a similar prediction. He believes that the underground and official Protestant churches will pay more attention to their parishioners largely because of the increased influence of lay volunteers. The number of pastors is relatively small and lay volunteers are beginning to take on tasks that used to be done by the clergy. In some places such as Zhejiang, pastors are reliant on wealthy parishioners for financial support and, therefore, must cater to these parishioners.

Comment  
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¶18. (C) The academics we met with had different relations with the Central Government. Fudan University Professor Liu Ping is the most critical and furthest away from the government. Fudan Center for American Studies Professor Edward Xu and Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Researcher Yan Kejia both maintain close ties to the Central Government and are often called upon by the Central Government and local governments to carry out studies on religion. Both Yan and Xu emphasized in their meetings with Poloffs that the government is becoming more open about religion and pressed Poloffs on what the Chinese Government can do to improve its standing in the U.S. Religious Freedom Report. Poloffs urged that the government be more transparent about its religious policies and also allow underground Protestants the freedom to meet openly. East China Normal University Professor Liu is somewhat of a maverick. He carries out research for the Central Government and appears to have good access to official religious organizations. However, he does not shy away from criticizing the government nor in taking provocative stances in the media (see reftel A).  
SCHUCHAT